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THE WHITE HOUSE

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President of Russia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Notetakers: Jill Sandler, Danielle Phillips,
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Interpreters: Peter Afanasenko

DATE, TIME: February 27, 2003, 7:35 - 7:52 a.m., EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Vladimir, it's good to hear your voice today.
And of course, I'd like to discuss several serious issues. (U)

President Putin: I'm very glad to hear you, too. I see you on
the t.v. screen and you sound very tough. (U)

The President: I'm learning from you. (U)

President Putin: Well, I don't know who's learning from whom.
(U)

The President: Well, let me first say the Iraq issue must not
come between me and you and our countries, and I don't think it
will, but you must understand this issue is serious because we
believe Saddam is a threat to our people and your people as well.
And so I'm just calling to stay in touch, friend to friend. I
happen to believe it's time to bring this issue to a head in the
U.N. Security Council, so in the next few days we will be working
with you and others to get a second resolution up. I firmly
believe Saddam isn't going to disarm and is stalling, and I
strongly believe that the sooner this ends, one way or another,
the better it is for everyone involved. Your Chief of Staff
Voloshin came and I appreciate you sending him. He assured me
you were not playing politics in Europe and I thank you for that.
It is very important that that should not be the case. I say
that because the French in America are taking a serious beating
in the press. Even the left-wing press, which doesn't like my
decisions on Iraq, are belittling the French. The relations with
the French are important, but we will have serious damage control
to do because the American people are very angry with the way the

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French are trying to divide the world. And so we'll stay in touch on this issue over the coming days, but I would like to see if we can come up with a common position. And also, on North Korea, very quickly, it is essential, Vladimir, that we continue to work together to figure out the best way to convince Kim Jong-Il to get rid of his nuclear ambitions. The so-called bilateral approach between the North Koreans and the United States will simply reinforce his bad behavior and willingness to create conditions for blackmail. And that's why it's very important that Russia and China and Japan and South Korea and the United States work together to convince Kim Jong-Il that if there is going to be any aid and help, he has to abandon his nuclear ambitions. Perhaps the country with the most at stake is China, and I've spoken to Jiang Zemin and to Hu Jintao, and told them that when Hu Jintao takes power that China must show good behavior; it has to be responsible for its behavior with North Korea. It's very important -- she has more to lose if he were to start putting warheads on missiles, or selling warheads. So we'll work together on issues of primary importance, but it's clear the key thing is when Russia and the United States work together, the world will be more peaceful, and it's important for you to know that that's how I think. So that's all I have to offer this morning. (S)

President Putin: Thank you very much. Let me start with North Korea--here, I understand and agree with you completely. We are ready to do everything we can to be effective. If you do not want to go the bilateral route, then we will seek other options in order to find a solution, and we will not insist on a bilateral approach. And you have given the proper signal on China's role. Now moving onto Iraq. There are many personalities who hold different views on Iraq. However, we must approach this without any emotion. And remember, what they used to say back in the times of ancient Greece: "You are angry, therefore, you are not right." I totally agree with you that this Iraq business will end sooner or later. And it is an important problem. It should be solved, one way or another. We have deep and abiding interests there. After this, we will get to like each other once again. Europe will need the United States again. And I keep saying this to all of my European colleagues. I say that in private, and in public as well. When I went to Paris and met with the President, I said in live broadcasts that I can honestly call the President of the United States my friend. (S)

The President: Thank you very much. (U)

President Putin: In this situation, we must not have different signals. These are important issues, and we cannot subject ourselves to emotions. (S)

The President: Thank you. (U)

President Putin: Iraq is, however, doing a number of positive things: Iraq has handed over a list of experts who had participated in the destruction of weapons of mass destruction. They have given us authorization for reconnaissance flights. But this is not enough. We need to keep pressing him. I sent former Prime Minister Primakov to meet with Saddam a few days ago and he tried to convince him to do a variety of things to rule out the possibility of war, and he was feeling him out about the possibility of Saddam's leaving. Now you know our position on finding a peaceful solution. We feel that the inspectors should formulate their requirements. If Iraq disrupts these requirements, our position will be a lot tougher. I would like to end with your idea. The two of us cannot lose sight of our strategic relationship just because of Iraq. And it will not affect our personal relationship either. (S)

The President: Vladimir, listen, thank you. Your defense of me as a person was very honorable of you. We will stay in touch, this is coming to an end over the next few days. We have to keep track of events; we must maintain our dialogue and we must move forward together. All my best to Ludmilla and the girls, and my best to you. (S)

President Putin: And to you, also, and to your wife Laura. Ludmilla asked me that she convey the best regards to Laura. (U)

The President: Very good, sir, we'll talk soon. (U)

President Putin: We will find the right solution together. (U)

The President: Thank you. Bye-bye. (U)

President Putin: Bye-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --